

## CHAPTER 9.0 Conclusion

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**Figure 79.** Ladd decal. Courtesy Candy Waugaman.

Ladd Field grew from the small testing station originally envisioned by Gen. Arnold into a wartime airbase with unusual roles. Although the activities at Ladd were only a small part of the worldwide conflict, Ladd Field was significant for cold weather testing, as an aircraft repair and supply depot and air transport hub, and as the transfer point for aircraft and cargo transiting the ALSIB route to the Soviet Union. Cold weather testing at Ladd helped to improve the aircraft and equipment used by front-line aircrews. Working together with the stateside research agencies and manufacturers, participants in Ladd's testing program contributed to the development of aircraft design, ground procedures, and personal equipment. As the transfer point for the ALSIB Lend-Lease program, Ladd Field saw 7,926 aircraft and associated cargo change hands. Though controversial, Lend-Lease aid to the Soviet Union played some part in the eventual defeat of Nazi Germany. Ladd Field also served as an air depot for the repair and supply of aircraft and as a key Air Transport Command airfield, processing thousands of passengers and tons of cargo and mail.

This compilation of Ladd Field's World War II heritage pulls together different aspects of the wartime activities on this installation but is not comprehensive. It is evident that there is more to learn and other participants who may be interested in telling their stories. Some aspects of Ladd Field were not addressed because of limited information or because they are large topics beyond scope of the WWII missions. These include engineering projects beyond the cantonment, early flood control, land use and acquisitions, and interactions in communities beyond the airfield. The full impact of Ladd's cold weather field tests on the overall development of combat aviation was beyond the scope of this project, but that area could reveal additional significance of the efforts undertaken at Ladd. The testing program's ties to leading figures such as Gen. Arnold, Col. McKinley, and others suggest that there is much more to the story. The ALSIB program, another large topic, was presented in overview here because it has already been well documented and debated by historians and participants.

A variety of people with different experiences of the airfield shared their perspectives on Ladd Field through written reminiscences, interviews, and articles. Some had never seen Alaska before being stationed here; others were the children of Fairbanks gold rush families; still others had Native heritage. They went on to careers in military service, commerce, entertainment, construction, aviation, education, and family life. Some stayed in Fairbanks, others left. One thread that is shared by so many of them is the effect that the war years and Ladd Field had on them.

Richard Frank's words convey the impact of these experiences. "North of Hangar Number One they had quite a gathering for a medal presentation. I'll never forget that," he said, recalling the scene and the man being honored. "As a young person, it dawned on me that he did something extraordinary, otherwise he wouldn't be recognized....I think of that person, every once in a while I don't know who he was or what he did, but he was recognized for something that he did. That was quite an honorable thing, so it stayed with me...."

Ladd Field, too, has been recognized. For those that contributed to the efforts here, large and small, ground-breaking and mundane, Ladd Field is their legacy. For the community whose destiny was changed by the establishment of this base and the nation that it served, the Ladd Field National Historic Landmark is a reminder of this effort and where it has brought us today.

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